




Isaac Bassett worked in the Senate as a page, messenger, and assistant doorkeeper from 1831 to 1895. His most abiding legacy is a manuscript he wrote, recording some of the more dramatic incidents and personalities in the Senate's history, and providing an unparalleled chronicle of the institution in the 19th century. According to his account, his most celebrated and unusual duty began on March 4, 1845, the last day of the 28th Congress. President pro tempore Willie Mangum, fearing that an appropriations bill would not pass before the Senate was scheduled to adjourn, instructed Bassett to turn the hands of the Senate Chamber clock back 10 minutes. The senator stated, "I know of no one who could do it better than you."¹ While Bassett continued to carry out this task for over half a century, in his memoir he expressed dismay, particularly when senators—some jovial, others not—called into question the constitutionality of the action. Bassett recounted, "I have been called often by all of the presiding officers of the Senate since to move the clock back. There have been many instances when it was absolutely necessary to have it done. Many an extra ordinary [sic] session has been saved when I have moved the hands back."² 

¹Papers of Isaac Bassett, Office of the Curator, U.S. Senate, 11 C 36–37.

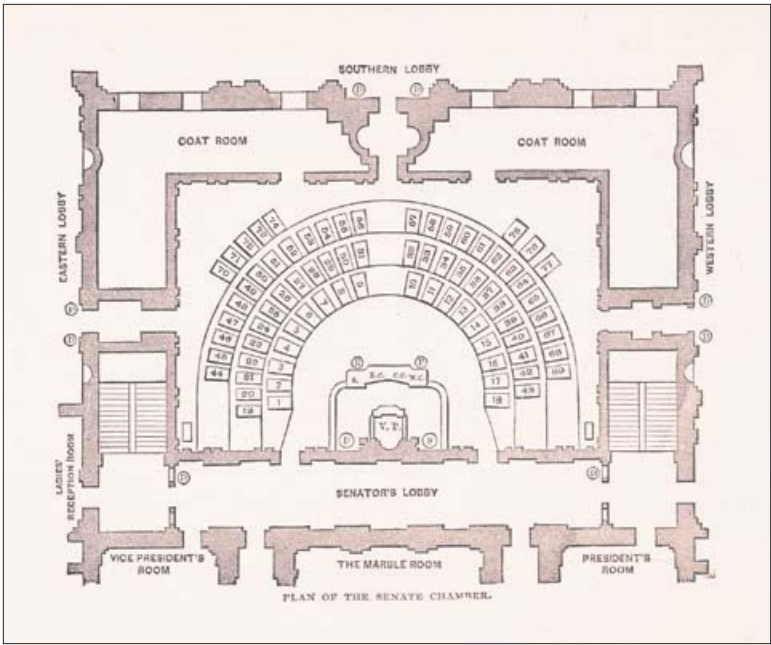
²Ibid., 11 C 38.



Capt. Isaac Bassett

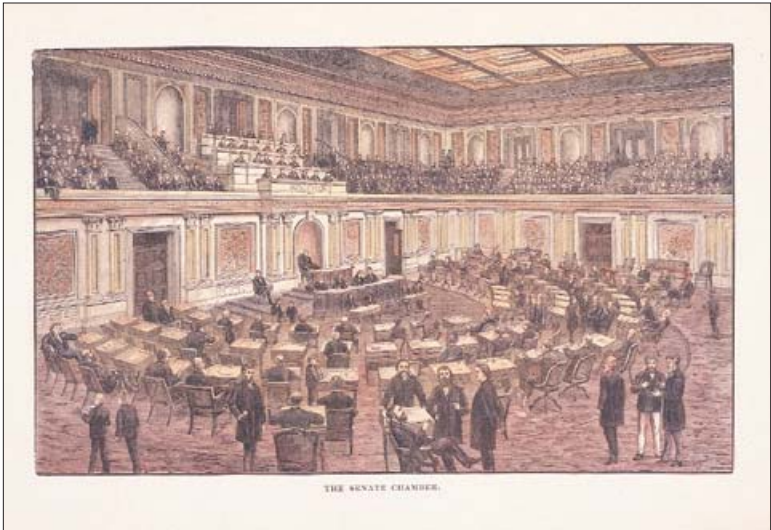
Harry O. Hall
Unidentified, ca. 1890
Photograph, black and white
4 1/16 x 5 15/16 inches (10.3 x 15.1 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00502.001

Senate Chamber



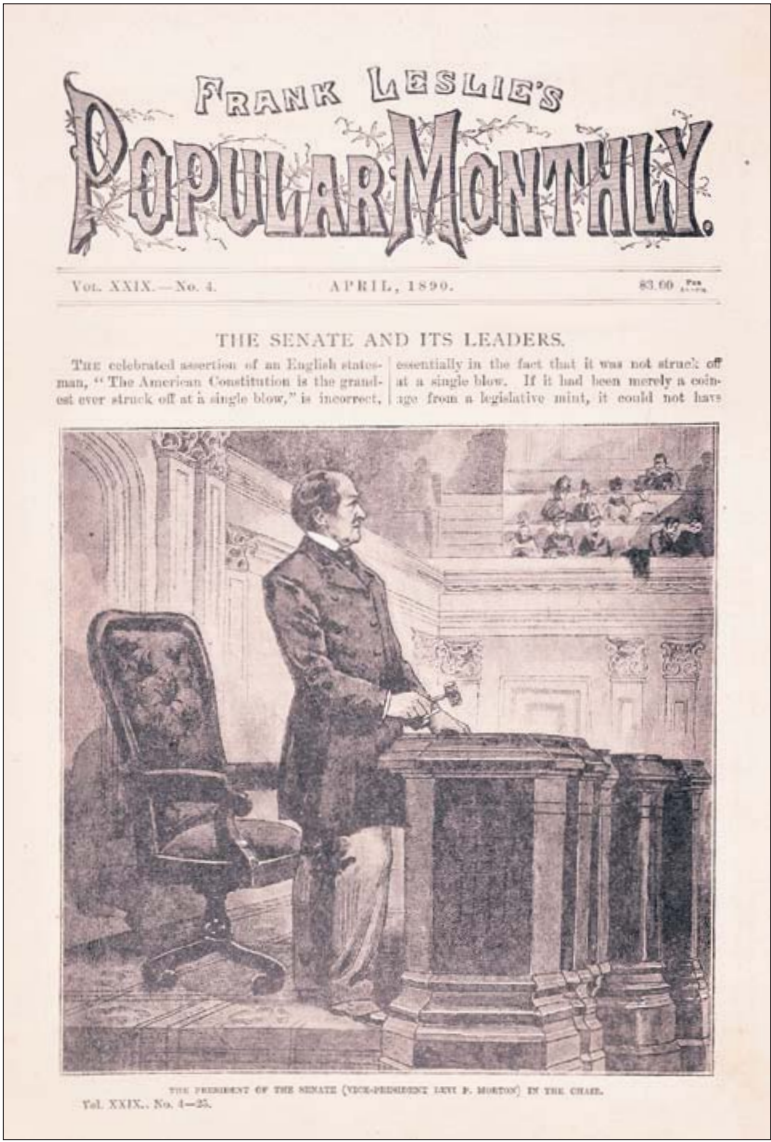
Plan of the Senate Chamber.

Unidentified
Picturesque Washington, 1888
Wood engraving, black and white
4 5/8 x 5 3/8 inches (11.7 x 14.3 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00556.001



The Senate Chamber.

Unidentified after S. S. Kilburn
Picturesque Washington, ca. 1889
Wood engraving, hand-colored
5 x 7 3/8 inches (12.7 x 18.7 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00645.001



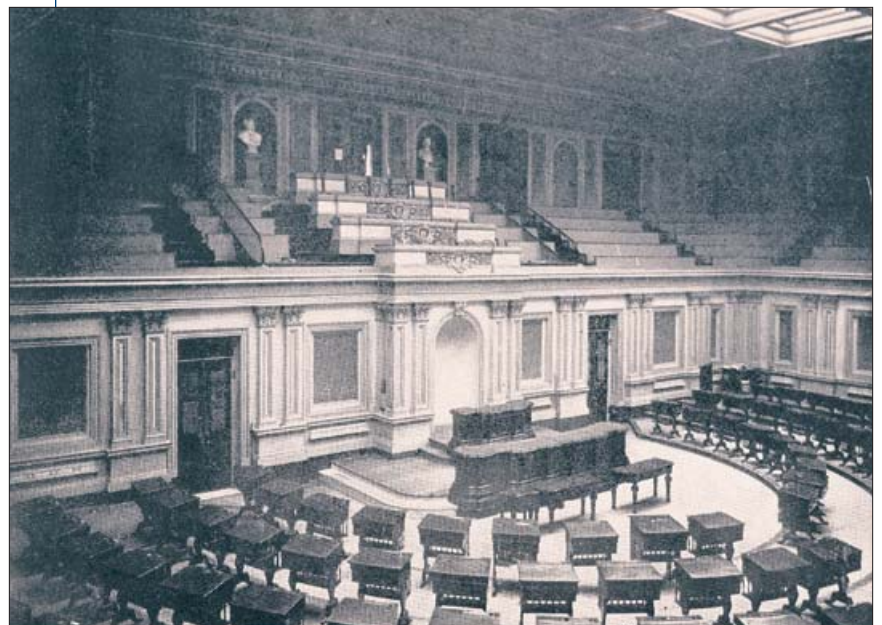
**The President of the Senate
(Vice-President Levi P. Morton) in the Chair.**

Unidentified
Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly, 04/1890
Halftone, black and white
6 1/4 x 6 inches (15.9 x 15.2 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00507.001



[U.S. Senate Chamber with Isaac Bassett and Pages]

Unidentified
Unidentified, ca. 1890
Photograph, black and white
7 ⁷/₁₆ x 9 ⁵/₈ inches (19.2 x 24.4 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00503.001



Washington . . . Senate Chamber.

Unidentified
Unidentified, ca. 1895
Halftone, black and white
3 ³/₄ x 5 inches (9.5 x 12.7 cm)
Cat. no. 38.00872.001